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ABSTRACT

This issue of FEEDBACK, a newsletter produced by the the Austin Independent School District Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE), illustrates the accuracy, validity, and fairness of ORE reports. The independence of the reports is explained. Internal and external quality controls are used to ensure reliability and accuracy of the reports. National dissemination of the information has been accomplished through publication and presentations at the annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). The ORE has established a national reputation and its staff has been represented in the elective offices and appointments of the AERA school evaluation division. Technical documentation of research is available in technical reports produced to support the findings in the general reports. (DWH)

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FEEDBACK

Volume 7 Number 5

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT
Office of Research and Evaluation

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Can I Trust ORE Reports?

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For eleven years now, the Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) has published reports for use in decision making. We in ORE know the quality and validity of those reports and present them with a high level of confidence to our audiences. However, our audiences often do not know the quality control behind a report and may have questions regarding the level of trust they should place in the findings and conclusions presented. Are ORE reports accurate, valid, and unbiased?

As a user of ORE reports, please consider the following information when judging our work.

INDEPENDENCE

ORE reports directly to the Superintendent, not the instructional or administrative staff whose programs are being evaluated. Our reports are published and provided to the Board of Trustees without editing by the instructional and administrative staff. However, our report drafts are reviewed by them, and comments on accuracy and comprehensiveness are carefully considered. If disagreements exist with the findings within an ORE report, non-ORE staff may prepare a separate statement to accompany the report when it is disseminated.

All published ORE reports are provided to the Board of Trustees, placed in the AISD Professional Library, and distributed to other audiences as appropriate or requested.

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RELIABILITY AND ACCURACY

Why are my means lower than yours?

Internal quality control is a primary concern for ORE. Our data, analyses, and reports are checked carefully at each step. ORE staff review each others' analyses and reports as a standard procedure. An important aspect of internal quality control is the use of data across evaluations; consequently, one person's data are carefully validated as others use them for additional analyses. Because of the longitudinal nature of ORE's data bases and reports, data are reanalyzed and rechecked annually as a new year's crop of information is added.

A critical external accuracy check occurs as researchers from other agencies use ORE data. Researchers from The University of Texas, the National Institute of Education, the National Center for the Study of Vocational Education at Ohio State University, and other agencies have reanalyzed our data. Recently, a researcher from Rochester, New York, independently recalculated and verified some of our districtwide achievement score averages as part of a study of reporting procedures.

ORE reports and supportive data are available to other researchers for use or verification, and we welcome those opportunities.

NATIONAL DISSEMINATION

ORE staff have published our findings and procedures in professional books and journals and have been a top contributor among public school research and evaluation offices to the programs at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) over the past five years. This represents an excellent record of acceptance by our peers in research and evaluation who judge and accept these publications and presentations.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION

ORE staff have been well represented in the elective offices and appointments of the school evaluation division of AERA. Six national awards have been given to ORE publications by this division. Currently, Glynn Ligon is the AERA acquisition editor for competency testing issues, and Walter Jordan-Davis is the graduate student representative for the evaluation division.

A key measure of ORE's national reputation is the high number of requests received for copies of our reports. In addition, other evaluators and researchers from all parts of the country call, write, and visit for advice and expertise in a variety of areas. Our office is known to have one of the best longitudinal data bases of any public school system, and researchers often contact us for data related to their work.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF

ORE staff became qualified to conduct our sophisticated research and evaluation activities through graduate programs in research, psychology, education, and related areas. Ph.D.-level training is required or preferred for all evaluator positions. Six of our current staff members are former public school teachers, and five others have taught at the college level.

With backgrounds in research and a commitment to contributions to the literature, ORE staff members subscribe to the highest of professional standards including the Standards for Evaluations of Educational Programs, Projects, and Materials prepared by The Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. (This Joint Committee is made up of one member from each of 12 national organizations associated with educational research.)

Subscriptions to professional publications and participation in professional organizations keep ORE staff up to date with the state of the art in research and evaluation.

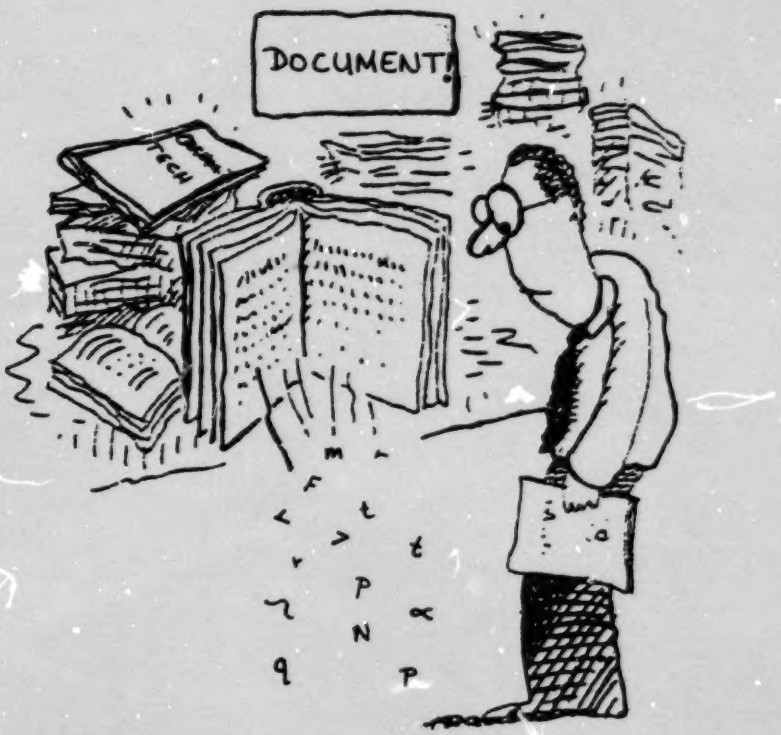
ADVISORY GROUPS

ORE has an Evaluation Advisory Committee composed of teachers, principals, administrators, parents, citizens, and other researchers. This committee reviews activities and advises ORE on our work. In addition meetings are held as needed with elementary, junior high, and senior high school building test coordinator groups to review testing policies, procedures, and materials.

ORE often meets with other elementary and secondary advisory groups, faculties, counselors, PTA's, etc. to elicit ideas and suggestions.

TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION

Replicability is a cornerstone of research. All procedures, analyses, and data are documented in a technical report to support the findings in our more general reports. Those statistics researchers love to see (i.e., F's, t's, r's p's, alphas, etc.) are provided in our technical reports.



FEEDBACK is a newsletter of the Office of Research and Evaluation of the Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas. The publication number is 83.14. For more information on ORE reports call ORE at 458-1227.